

Teachers who sleep the wave leads: Neoliberalism and teacher training

Professor que dorme a onda leva: Neoliberalismo e formação de professores

Maestro que se duerme la ola se lo lleva: Neoliberalismo y formación docente

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ABSTRACT

The reflection problematizes the educational implications of the discourse on the need for permanent teaching updating in the scenario of expansion of neoliberalism. It consists of theoretical and bibliographical research methodologically supported by the political analysis of the educational discourse. It is organized in three moments. In the first, it discusses neoliberalism as a “general way of thinking”. In the second, it reflects on the neoliberal conception of “free” time and how it is projected onto teachers. In the third, it problematizes the properly educational dimension of this discourse with regard to the training of educators. It concludes that the discourse of permanent updating understands education based on market assumptions and inculcates in teachers the idea that they are outdated professionals who need to renounce their time, thought and humanity.

Keywords: Teacher Training. Continuing Education. Free Time. Neoliberalism. Hegemonic Discourse.

RESUMO

A reflexão problematiza as implicações educacionais do discurso da necessidade de permanente atualização docente no cenário de expansão do neoliberalismo. Consiste em pesquisa teórica e bibliográfica metodologicamente sustentada na análise política do discurso educativo. Está organizada em três partes. Na primeira discute o neoliberalismo como “forma geral de pensamento”. Na segunda reflete sobre a concepção neoliberal de tempo e como ela se projeta sobre os docentes. Na terceira problematiza a dimensão propriamente educativa desse discurso no que diz respeito à educação dos educadores. Conclui que o discurso da permanente atualização compreende a educação com base em pressupostos de mercado e inculca entre os docentes a ideia de que são profissionais ultrapassados que precisam renunciar de seu tempo, do pensamento e de sua humanidade.

Palavras-chave: Formação Docente. Formação Continuada. Tempo Livre. Neoliberalismo. Discurso Hegemônico.

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RESUMEN

Esta reflexión problematiza las implicaciones educativas del discurso de la necesidad de una permanente actualización docente en el escenario de expansión del neoliberalismo. Consiste en una investigación teórica y bibliográfica apoyada metodológicamente en el análisis político del discurso educativo. Se organiza en tres momentos. En el primero analiza el neoliberalismo como una “forma general de pensamiento”. En el segundo, reflexiona sobre la concepción neoliberal del tiempo y cómo se proyecta sobre los docentes. En el tercero, problematiza la dimensión propiamente educativa de este discurso con respecto a la formación de los educadores. Concluye que el discurso de la actualización permanente entiende la educación desde supuestos de mercado e inculca en los docentes la idea de que son profesionales desfasados que necesitan renunciar a su tiempo, pensamiento y humanidad.

Palabras clave: Formación Docente. Educación Continua. Tiempo Libre. Neoliberalismo. Discurso Hegemónico.

INTRODUCTION

*Everything can work, but nothing makes sense.
It's as if we've lost love
somewhere along the way.*
Jan Masschelein

Neoliberalism is not just an economic system. It is a social and historical construct that establishes a systematic set of values and relationships between people and between people and “things”. This set gives meaning to the world, to what is lived. Neoliberalism is therefore a discourse, as defined by Laclau and Mouffe (2015b, p. 39): “a system of relations with other objects and these relations are not given by the mere referential materiality of the objects, but are socially constructed”. As a discourse, it not only describes the world, but defines it, gives it meaning, allows it to be seen and, at the same time, conceals it (Gur-Ze'ev, 2007). It parsimoniously establishes consensus, becomes hegemonic and, at this point, not only tells us what to look at, what to pay attention to, but also hides other things from view, especially those that invite us to think about other possibilities for making sense of the world (Laclau and Mouffe, 2015a; Biesta, 2017).

The idea that teachers need to be constantly qualified (or trained, or improved, or updated, etc.) is an example of consensus. It appears in elaborate form in academic research, articles, dissertations and theses (see, for example: Gasque and Costa, 2003; Gatti, 2003; Pimentel, Palazzo and Oliveira, 2009; Benedicto and Silva, 2018) and is also recurrent in various media with simple, direct and commercial language, reaching the status of a cliché. The following quote expresses the discourse we want to problematize in this essay:

Educators need to keep up with the changes taking place in the world. Have you ever stopped to think that information is constant and that new knowledge and new ways of thinking are put into practice every day? What you knew until yesterday may be outdated and no longer the absolute truth. That's why a good educator is always up-to-date and conveys confidence in their lessons. (Back, 2015, emphasis in original)

According to Valério López (2008, p. 83), there are two ways in which a concept or idea degrades and becomes a cliché: when it separates itself from the problem that gives it meaning and when it becomes trapped on the level of the instituted. In any case, “it always denotes a non-thought”, a naturalization of the unnatural, in other words, a condition of hegemony of an idea (Laclau and Mouffe, 2015a).

Through the political analysis of educational discourse (Laclau and Mouffe, 2015a; Plá, 2022), what we want to ask here is: to what extent is the discourse on the need for permanent and constant teacher training aligned with the expansion of neoliberalism in the education sector (including when it is covered with justifications such as “acquisition of professional skills”, “expansion of teaching competencies”, “teacher professionalism”, etc.)? How does this discourse understand teachers, especially with regard to the use/enjoyment of “free” time? And, in particular, what impact does this discourse have on the educational process, i.e. how does it project itself onto subjectivity, how does it educate educators?

In the first part, we will argue that neoliberalism comprises a “general form of thought” that is imperialist and colonizes subjectivity. In the second part, the focus of the analysis is on the relationship with time and how the neoliberal conception of “free” time is projected onto teachers, especially through the idea of “updating”. These two parts seek to support the argument that neoliberalism, as a hegemonic discourse, promotes a colonization of time and the imaginary that amplifies the inadequacy of human life to the desires and rhythms of capitalism. The third part then seeks to problematize the properly educational dimension of this discourse (Plá, 2022), contrasting the hegemonic neoliberal conception of teacher training with that of critical authors who support the importance of stopping and looking at the teaching experience.

NEOLIBERAL HEGEMONY AND ITS EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

*O antigo bezerro de ouro, de ouro
É novamente adorado, dourado
O homem só vende consumo, consumo
Usado fica descartado,
Surrado, surrupiado
Tom Zé, Mamon, Vira-lata na Via Lactea*

Neoliberalism projects itself onto reality as its own language, a way of thinking that implies the ordering of things and bodies, a way of being in the world (Grenier and Orléan, 2007). It is thus characterized as a refined form of imperialism that seeks to colonize the social and individual imagination (Kaščák and Pupala, 2011) by claiming to be free of political interference, as the pure manifestation of reality, of things as they are, of Truth (with capital letter). As “the Truth”, the neoliberal discourse seeks to depoliticize relations between individuals, institutions, countries, etc. (Kaščák and Pupala, 2011). From an economic point of view, it understands all forms of relationships as commodity exchanges based on the logic of personal interest and, therefore, personal gain. Connell (2013, p. 101) states that this logic requires institutional and cultural transformations that elevate it to a paradigm, due to the supposedly evident effectiveness of the governance, organization and control models of private institutions, treated under the euphemism of “international best practices”. As a consequence of this change, everything is a commodity, including people, who then need to become more attractive in the great market of exchange (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2001).

Since everything is a commodity, it is up to everyone to “perform” in the most interesting way, investing everything they have, especially their most valuable asset, time, in improving their “employability”. In this sense, failure and poverty are consequences of the individuals’ action

or inaction, because they are too lazy, ignorant or unqualified (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2001). This is an efficient strategy for naturalizing and justifying inequality and (self-)exploitation, because the market, elevated to the status of “idol” (Dufour, 2008; Benjamin, 2019; Souza, 2021), is not held accountable, nor is it required to be other. At the same time, it is argued that the market itself offers the possibilities for overcoming difficult living conditions, as long as the individual is willing to sacrifice and invest time, money and effort in becoming an entrepreneur. As a “general way of thinking”, neoliberalism seeks to control educational discourse in order to inculcate unquestionable and supposedly self-evident values, such as freedom of choice and self-determination for individual success.

Kašćák and Pupala (2011) argue that neoliberalism, as a discourse, does not manifest itself as a set of uniform and cohesive practices, but operates in unequal, misshapen and often contradictory ways. Thus, it is not a homogeneous ideology, but a set of practices and discourses that, in the end, converge and strengthen each other, even absorbing part of the criticism, or rather, incorporating critical elements in such a way as to undermine its transformative potential. They thus understand that neoliberalism, in its condition as a hegemonic discourse in contemporary times, has reached the condition of a consensus that seeks to convince all individuals that there are no other ways of experiencing the world and, thus, any attempt at resistance and opposition will fail in the face of the (self-)evident “Truth” of the socio-political and economic processes of the free market. In Gur-Ze’ev’s terms (2001, p. 332), neoliberalism educates the imaginary through a “normalizing education [that] is founded on such an unchallenged consensus and is committed to securing its self-evidence”. It is therefore a powerful form of colonization of the imagination.

Normalizing education establishes and naturalizes a set of valid values (those that reinforce the self-evidence of ideology) and, at the same time, establishes a set of invalid values (those that somehow denounce ideology or propose other possibilities of existence). In other words, discourse gives meaning to the world by saying what is real and omitting other possibilities for assigning meaning and experiencing reality (Gur-Ze’ev, 2007; Biesta, 2017). In educational terms, i.e. in the process of interfering with the subjectivity of others (Plá, 2022), this discourse produces clichés which, despite the contradictions and the possibilities of other ways of looking at reality, strengthen the perception that there is no other alternative. Any opposing attitude is pointed out and denounced as ideological, romantic, detached from reality, by the agents who adhere to the norm: only they can speak. Chauí (1982, p. 2) states that overcoming the condition of cliché requires placing concepts and ideas back in their context with real relationships; in other words, tensing the field of instituting discourse in such a way that it returns the concept to the problems that make it arise, preventing the discourse of the “competent” from blocking the debate. This discursive “competence” considers science to be a “private thing” where “not just anyone can say anything to anyone else at any time and in any place” (Chauí, 1982, p. 02). This discourse of the competent is questioned by Chauí, who considers it to be the “discourse of the instituted”, which institutionally allows and authorizes only certain interlocutors who “have been previously recognized as having the right to speak and listen, in which the places and circumstances have already been predetermined so that they are allowed to speak and listen and, finally, in which the content and form have already been authorized according to the canons of the sphere of their own competence” (Chauí, 1982, p. 07). In order to think about teacher training, this issue of “competence” is particularly important, especially from the angle presented by Chauí (1982, p. 8), as a critique of bureaucratization:

In order to reach the region where competent discourse is best determined and most effective, we need to refer to a specific historical phenomenon: the bureaucratization of contemporary societies and the idea of Organization that underlies this phenomenon.

Bureaucratization, here, takes the form of an impersonal process, devoid of intentionality, detached from power relations, which operates as an alibi so that responsibility for the deleterious consequences of neoliberal policies is not attributed to the sectors and agents that benefit from them. The process of bureaucratization means that injustices remain without anyone being held responsible for them: that is just the way things are. Through gradual, fragmentary and sometimes apparently contradictory actions, neoliberalism has achieved the status of a hegemonic model of thought, a hegemonic discourse on reality, and has established control over the educational discourse (and the school sector), perceptible in the myth of meritocracy, employability, self-responsibility and performance indicators as the engine of development (Pongratz, 2006) and of the school as a technology at the service of society's interests (Biesta, 2012; 2017), or rather, of the market's interests. Thus, it becomes difficult to question neoliberal ideals, their conception of freedom, of the human being, of education and training, especially for those disadvantaged individuals for whom the options available comprise the range of possibilities established by the "free market" (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2001; Miraftab, 2009).

Despite the apparently contradictory nature of the neoliberal reforms in the field of education, Peters (2001, p. 66) identifies, as common features, the need to redesign curricula in order to meet the need to train qualified and flexible workers, with skills and competences suited to the "new reality". Corroborating this, Carter and Dediwalage (2010) state that it is common for critical values, themes and flags to be absorbed and emptied of their original critical content. We understand that this is what occurred with the idea of "continuing education" which, through a semantic hijacking, led all educational efforts to be directed towards the development of human capital. By being naturalized, this discourse turns educational institutions into specialized service providers aligned with market demands (Pongratz, 2006; Connell, 2013). The university is de-characterized as a public time-space for training, humanization and creativity (which implies thinking about other possible worlds) and, by embracing the sacralized ideals of the market, it becomes an institution that aims to make a profit or produce profitable workers. Education here is just a commodity, just a business: if the indicators improve, it is because everything is going well. Teachers occupy a difficult place in this scenario: they are required to consume this commodity through training and qualification, and they are expected to provide a competitive and "up-to-date" service that is constantly called into question by a permanent evaluation and classification tribunal that can be seen in the discourse of "value for (public) money" and in the processes of ranking institutions based on standardized tests (Campbell and Sherington, 2006; Pongratz, 2006). In this sense, according to Masschelein and Simons (2018, p. 153), teachers are called upon to assume an attitude focused exclusively on measurable results and to continually justify their actions, including what they do in their "free" time with a view to results.

NEOLIBERALISM AND "FREE" TIME: 24/7 REGIME AND DEHUMANIZATION

*Everything was ready, only the straps still hung from the sides,
but they were obviously unnecessary,
the officer didn't need to be tied up.*
Franz Kafka, In the Penal Settlement

Neoliberalism, as a general model of thinking, is pushing for a radicalization of the "time is money" cliché. Not just of the time traditionally dedicated to work, in the workspace, but of all time, in a regime that is projected as 24/7, 24 hours a day, seven days a week (Crary, 2016). It is a radicalization of the cliché that produces a new rationality about time that was/is only possible due to technical and discursive developments that have made it possible to configure a personal

and social identity that conforms and submits to the “unquestionable” and pervasive logic of the market. Pervasiveness is a quality of phenomena that (apparently) cannot be opposed. Crary (2016, p. 19) states that the 24/7 regime makes possible, and even normal, the idea of a work regime without breaks and without limits, a state of uninterrupted needs in which the individual is always in debt, and always needs to pay, with his own time, to temporarily satisfy the needs that are always encouraged, and never placated. A way of life only possible for inanimate things. It is a radicalization of dehumanization, the objectification of the human (Adorno, 1995). Still according to Crary (2016, p. 24),

Today there are few significant moments of human existence (with the exception of sleep) that have not been permeated or appropriated by working time, consumption or marketing. [...] this has happened in the midst of the dissolution of most of the boundaries between private and professional time, between work and consumption. In this paradigm of permanent connection, the greatest prize is awarded to the activity itself.

For Crary, sleep time, that time freed from all pressures (when we sleep we do not consume, we do not produce, we do not create anything profitable, etc.), constitutes the last frontier of neoliberal capitalism’s advance on the individual: “the fact that we spend a good period of our lives sleeping, freed from a quagmire of simulated need, remains one of the great human affronts to the voracity of contemporary capitalism. Sleep is an unavoidable gap in the theft of time to which capitalism subjects us” (Crary, 2016, p. 20). Of course, people sleep, and will continue to do so, but sleep is increasingly treated as something manageable, as a variable function that is distanced from the idea of necessity and from our natural condition as living beings, not machines. Although sleep cannot be eliminated, it can be undermined, disrupted, plundered and blamed. The pressure to increase productive time also erodes other times, including the seduction of reduced sleep time. In 2019, the second best-selling book in Brazil was *The Miracle Morning* (Época Negócios, 2020), by Hal Elrod (2018), originally published in 2014 and first published in Portuguese in 2016, in which, based on the author’s own supposed experience of success, there are statements such as: “The connection between mind and body is powerful, and I believe we should take responsibility for all aspects of our lives, including the power to wake up every day feeling energized, regardless of how many hours of sleep we get” (Elrod, 2018, p. 83); and

What I discovered was that, whether I slept nine, eight, seven, six, five or even four hours, as long as I consciously decided before going to bed that I would get the perfect amount of sleep — that the hours would energize my body to feel wonderful in the morning — I always woke up feeling better than I ever had before. (Elrod, 2018, p. 84)

Elrod’s argument suggests that success is a matter of individual decision. In this case, the material conditions of existence, such as qualified access to the world of work, social, economic, gender and racial inequalities, structural unemployment, commuting difficulties (especially in large urban centers), the cost of living and inflation, countless family issues that involve care and dedication to the other, among many others, are secondary if preceded by a conscious decision. Therefore, failure is also a matter of decision. This is a radicalization of the concept, already denounced by McLaren and Farahmandpur (2001), that those who do not achieve success are lazy: “In the neoliberal paradigm [...], sleep is, above all, for the weak” (Crary, 2016, p. 23). The individual is blamed and the socio-economic model is just the stage on which the plot unfolds. In other words: you failed because you chose to sleep.

In addition, there is the explicit idea that the amount of time dedicated to rest, especially “sleep”, is negotiable, and that its retraction has no physical or mental implications, given the existence of a supposed “power to wake up every day feeling energized”. The consequence of this premise is that no one else has the right to be tired. Or rather, no one has the right to demonstrate oneself tired: it is a sign of weakness, failure and negativity. The process of hyper-individualization, a corollary of self-determination, self-responsibility and competition for performance and for presenting oneself as attractive (employable), hinders, or even prohibits, the possibilities of sharing tiredness, of recognizing the limits of the other and of the self. Han (2017, p. 71) states that “[t]he fatigue of the performance society is a solitary fatigue, which acts by individualizing and isolating”. Crary (2016, p. 18) ponders that, although the 24/7 world has the appearance of a community, of a social world, it “is a non-social model, with machine performance — and a suspension of life that does not reveal the human cost required to sustain its effectiveness” (Crary, 2016, p. 18). Han (2018), similarly, argues that the violence of the isolation of the “tired self”, its interdiction to say “tired”, destroys any community, any closeness, any giving of oneself to the other: it is a time emptied of meaning in which the new god, in its ubiquity, allows no pause.

On the altar of the market god, the human element is immolated and as compensation there remains a promise of success without *donum*. If time still has value, it is as a commodity, therefore interchangeable, not as the preciousness of experience. The subject of neoliberalism, according to Larrosa (2017, p. 23), is that of

permanent and accelerated training, constant updating, endless recycling, is a subject who uses time as a value or as a commodity, a subject who cannot waste time, who always has to make the most of time, who cannot put anything off, who has to keep up with what’s happening, who cannot be left behind, which is why, because of this obsession with following the accelerated course of time, this subject no longer has time.

Permanent connection (Crary, 2016) in time emptied of meaning is accompanied by a feeling of omnipresence that, in a way, satisfies the individuals while annihilating them (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1985; Gurze’ev, 2002). Ubiquity is favored by the degree of technological development. Santaella (2013, p. 16) understands ubiquity as “the coordination of intelligent, mobile and stationary devices to provide users with immediate and universal access to information and new services, in a transparent way, with the aim of increasing human capabilities”. The author states that the current stage of technical and technological development has led her “to the conviction that the contemporary condition of our existence is ubiquitous” (Santaella, 2013, p. 16). We are thus concurrently in one place and out of it. What is more, we are called upon for any reason and at any time to be present anywhere. It is possible, and even advisable, to agree with the author’s statement regarding our condition in neoliberal capitalism. It is more difficult to agree with her optimism. This discourse is aggressively directed at teachers and seeks to create a naturalized idea that all periods of the day can be “voluntarily” dedicated to work. Let us look at two examples that articulate ubiquity with the immolation of oneself for the market, chosen from a myriad of almost identical options that are aimed directly or indirectly at teachers.

The company Wakke (<https://wakke.co/>), which offers software with “management solutions for educational institutions”, is an example, among many others, of the hegemony of the neoliberal discourse of individual accountability and the relegation of time to the status of a commodity and the ubiquity of “productive time”. On its home page there is a link to a company blog through which it offers a range of articles for different players. The “Tips for teachers” [*Dicas para professores*] section contains a number of texts, including one from April 24, 2017, entitled “6 ways for education

professionals to keep up-to-date” [*6 maneiras de o profissional da educação se manter atualizado*] (Wakke, 2017). The article begins with the maxim: “There is no doubt that working in education is hard but very rewarding”. It goes on to attribute the devaluation of the teaching career to its very complexity. In addition, it notes that “lower salaries, lack of structure to carry out the work, excessive working hours, have a dangerous consequence: demotivation”. The problem, then, is not the material conditions that make a teaching career uninteresting, but demotivation. In other words: it is an individual problem, of feeling, of the demotivated educator. In the next paragraph, it offers a solution (a tip): “To reverse this feeling and to do quality work, the best tip we can give is to seek constant training”. Once again, this is an individual issue, of the educator who is in debt, outdated and who needs to train in order to motivate oneself so that his/her work can be “performed” with quality. The teachers need to take responsibility for their training. They need to dedicate part of their time, and not just the part already dedicated to work, to becoming better workers.

Something similar can be seen in Faculdade Unina’s advertising (<https://unina.edu.br/sobre/>). Under the “blog” tab, you can find several opinion articles aimed at its target audience. The article “Why it’s always important to update teacher training” (vagueness about the nature of the sentence in the original) [*Por que sempre é importante a atualização na formação de professor*] (Unina, 2020), from March 20, 2020, signed by the institution itself, begins with the statement that, with the advent of the internet and new technologies, the pace of change in society has intensified. It states that in this scenario there is a big difference between the generation born in the final decades of the 20th century and those born at the beginning of the 21st century, and that “[t]hese, in turn, are totally different from those who came just 5 or 6 years later” (Unina, 2020). Based on these statements, summarized in five lines, it argues that “teachers cannot become outdated”.

From the above, it can be understood that teachers are professionals in debt, outdated, a condition they need to constantly remedy. However, if they pay attention to the premise that children are “totally” different at least twice every decade, teachers never manage to overcome their “obsolete” status. This is a problem for teachers who, if they want to “be good, need to be constantly changing” (Unina, 2020). Consequently, it is the teacher’s responsibility to keep up-to-date, attractive and qualified: “By investing in your continuing education, you are making yourself available to understand your students and their problems. [...] The quality of your lessons will increase, as will your pass rate”. A teacher who succeeds is a teacher who pleases the students and offers gains to the institutions that provide the conditions for improving their employability on the market. The conception of education mobilized here is commercial (economic transaction) and not professional (Biesta, 2017, p. 40): the satisfaction of the clientele embodied in “their pass rate”. The article (Unina, 2020) ends with a brief acknowledgement of the material difficulties (time, structure and incentives) experienced by educators. Even at this point, the projection of responsibility for (promised) success and failure is placed on the individual and the way they decided to spend their “free” time:

When looking to update your training, you may come up against some challenges. Lack of time, structure and incentive are the main ones. In the case of the first two, I advise you to look for courses at colleges that suit your routine or online classes. For the third, I have to say that schools and universities are looking for up-to-date professionals with good teaching skills.

A “good teacher”, in this conception, is one who invests their resources and their “time”, the rarest resource, to become a teacher with a slightly lower debt. It is a teacher who not only competes with other teachers to become more employable, but also a teacher who, in this never-ending race, consumes on an unprecedented scale and accumulates courses and more courses in an almost

frenetic way. Crary (2016, p. 19) points out that, at the current stage of capitalism, accumulation is no longer of “things”, but of services, images and procedures which, in the case of teachers, promise “the constant improvement of their professional skills” (Unina, 2020). It is at this point that ubiquity, the (un)human condition in contemporary times, aligns itself with the hegemonic discourse, and is even confused with it. According to Wakke’s article (2017),

The first step to staying up-to-date is to keep up with what is new in the field. Reading newspapers and magazines specializing in education is a simple and very productive task. Nowadays, there is the advantage that many of these specialized publications are available on the internet. So, in any spare time, professionals can read an article and get new ideas for improving their work. [...] Thanks to the internet, it is now possible to take training or specialization courses through distance learning. There are paid courses, but there are also many quality free courses offered by highly respected institutions. [...] Online courses have the advantage that students can attend classes at a time that suits them best. However, you need discipline and commitment to see it through to the end and benefit from it.

Ubiquity does not just mean that work is everywhere and at all times, but that there is no longer any time that cannot be dedicated to work. Unina, in the “Institutional” tab, states that it offers courses on a 100% distance learning basis, and adds: “If the problem is short time due to the hustle and bustle of everyday life or family obligations, we offer flexible teaching, where you study at home, following your pace and being able to choose the best time to focus on your studies” (<https://unina.edu.br/sobre/>). The freedom that should be the hallmark of “free time” is hijacked and inverted into coercion, into pressure to make productive use of it (Han, 2018, p. 65). And since one is “free to choose to work or not”, this (no longer) free time cannot be counted as paid time, because it is “voluntarily and consciously” dedicated to expanding individual professional skills.

Wakke’s article (2017) closes with the vaticination of the Truth, that is, with the reification of the neoliberal perspective as the only possible path, as the only way of being a teacher, and even with a manifest interdiction of the possibility of thinking of other alternatives, other ways of being a teacher and experiencing time: “Since [educators] are constant transmitters of content, there is no way of thinking of another form of quality work other than the one that is always in search of updating and improvement”.

It is really important to point out that the two institutions used as examples here are not the only ones that mobilize this set of values, quite the opposite: the idea that teachers are outdated professionals who need to invest time and money in their training around the clock, that the material conditions in which they work are secondary, that free time, including that reserved for rest and sleep, can be partially or totally transformed into time for work, are hegemonic conceptions that are reproduced as clichés by institutions, governments and even researchers. What we want to stress is that they operate on a discursive plane that naturalizes a set of economic, social, moral and epistemological relations as truths that cannot be challenged: this is the way the world is and we have to adapt to it. The neoliberal imperative colonizes time, hijacking it and perverting it into time for work. Time off, and even sleep, does not constitute an interruption, “it merely slows down working time, rather than transforming it into another time” (Han, 2018, p. 64).

To the extent that the idea that “time is money” becomes absolute, there is a process of colonization of the imaginary (and of the body). In this process we are offered, as compensation, the feeling that all the effort is worth it. And furthermore, that even for the unsuccessful, success is a

possibility, as long as there is effort, self-determination, as long as we decide to “take responsibility for all aspects of our lives, including the power to wake up every day feeling energized, regardless of how many hours of sleep we get” (Elrod, 2018, p. 83). The discourse is seductive: anyone can be successful, not everyone, but anyone. It makes the subject of neoliberalism an enthusiastic victim (Gur-Ze’ev, 2002) who feels satisfied by the same device that annihilates him/her (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1985). All one is asked to do is to renounce... time.

PROFESSIONALIZATION AND TEACHER (DE)FORMATION: NO TIME TO STOP, NO TIME TO LOOK

*Le era muy difícil dormir.
Dormir es distraerse del mundo*
Jorge Luis Borges, Funes El Memorioso

As a system of relations between people and objects, as a system of thought, in other words, as a hegemonic discourse that attributes meaning to the world and to experience (Laclau and Mouffe, 2015a), neoliberalism is also an educational enterprise. By promoting the internalization of its values and elevating them as ahistorical and natural, it colonizes the imaginary and hijacks time, corrupting it into “productive time”. To be clear, we are not just saying that there is a type of education for neoliberalism, such as that which manifests itself in the emphasis on acquiring skills and competences for a competitive and constantly changing world, which materializes in educational reforms, standardized tests, quality indicators and rankings (Pongratz, 2006; Ball, 2012; Biesta, 2017; Biesta, 2018). We are also saying that neoliberalism itself, as a hegemonic discourse in contemporary times, is educational: it inserts the bodies and minds of individuals and society into its control devices (Gur-Ze’ev, 2005a; 2005b).

The neoliberal discourse acts on a deep dimension of subjectivity in such a way that individuals involved in education, when they start working in the field, when they educate, are already doing so from the internalization of neoliberal values, taken as “Truths” to be applied/reproduced. The neoliberal discourse and, in particular, the discourse projected onto teachers based on neoliberal dogmas educates educators, interferes in their subjectivity and reverberates in their experience, or rather, in the poverty of their experience (Benjamin, 2019), given the invisibilization of alternatives to neoliberalism. Being creative (Gur-Ze’ev, 2005b), it absorbs elements of criticism and distorts it. The very idea of “continuing teacher training” was a banner of critical agents (Alferes and Mainardes, 2011). Under neoliberalism, “continuing education” is reduced to a technical dimension and presented as “the constant improvement of professional skills” (Unina, 2020) in “teacher professionalization”.

The discourse of professionalization is defined by Masschelein and Simons (2018) as a tactic to tame teachers and consider them mere service providers, replacing the wisdom of experience with specialization in skills that situate teachers as experts, abandoning their “responsibility for the world” and leaving them at the service of the demands of the “culture of quality”, in which

school becomes a business and teaching becomes a job, rather than a way of life in which there is no clear distinction between work and private life and in which one must lose track of time in pursuit of a love that often extends beyond the hours worked. In other words, there is no longer any “free time” to give shape to love for the subject, for the cause — at least during business hours. (Masschelein and Simons, 2018, p. 144-145)

And, in neoliberalism, all time is commercial, because time only has value as an interchangeable commodity (Crary, 2016; Han, 2018). The supposed knowledge, skills and attitudes that make a teacher competent are not the same (we would say that they are antagonistic) as those that make a teacher well-trained. The competent, standardized teacher is on hand to provide a service at a “business counter” guided by demands imposed in the name of social expectations: teachers are no longer expected to think, but to spout words that originate elsewhere, they are “constant transmitters of content” (Wakke, 2017). In this sense, they cannot stand still. A good teacher, by this logic, is not someone with depth, but someone who is always “chasing”, always “owing” and “showing service”, “always doing something, moving, changing — this is what confers prestige, as opposed to stability, which is often synonymous with inaction” (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2009, p. 193). The pedagogical responsibility that tries to “open up new worlds and form interest” (Masschelein and Simons, 2018, p. 145) is eliminated, replacing it with the “meta-competence of the competent teacher [which] is the ability to ensure that he or she is available and employable at all times and in all places” (Masschelein and Simons, 2018, p. 146).

This conception of being a teacher is that of an all-purpose multitasking professional (Masschelein and Simons, 2018), capable of adapting to adverse situations, a “flexible” professional. This does not require a trained teacher (with enduring loves, convictions and confidence), but one who is trained for innovation. This is a professional modeled on what Sennett (2000, p. 9) calls “flexible capitalism”, which requires workers to “be agile, open to short-term changes, continually take risks, and depend less and less on formal laws and procedures”. The notion of “flexibility” comes from the simple observation of tree branches that bend and recover under the impact of the wind, adapting to circumstances so as not to be broken. Nonetheless, flexible capitalism “focuses more on the forces that bend people” (Sennett, 2000, p. 53), adapting workers to the volatility of consumer demands because the “strongest ingredient of this new production process is the will to let the changing demands of the outside world determine the internal structure of institutions” (Sennett, 2000, p. 60). A popular version of this stance is the (now already a cliché) accusation that schools operate with 19th century forms for 21st century students.

The appearance on the scene of the calculating teacher (Masschelein and Simons, 2018), forced to conceive of their work as a productive, results-oriented enterprise is the consequence — rather than the cause — of the requirement to be accountable. Teachers are left in the position of “retailers of culture” (Mourigan, 1970, p. 43), which promotes a type of “training” that abandons pedagogical thinking which “is not a gymnastics, nor a skill, but an openness, an encounter” (Valério López, 2008, p. 72) that can only take place in an intensive time, “putting into play the meaning and value” of words, information, skills and knowledge (Valério López, 2008). However, training should be related to free time because it avoids acceleration, additivity (Han, 2021, p. 12): “thought presupposes the ability to conclude, to stop, to linger. In this, it differs from calculation in that thought does not allow itself to be accelerated as much as one would like... The subject of performance is incapable of reaching a conclusion. He shatters under the compulsion of always having to produce more performance” (Han, 2021, p. 29-30). For Sennett (2000, p. 10), “perhaps the aspect of flexibility that causes the most confusion is its impact on personal character”, which can be defined as “the ethical value we attach to our own desires and our relationships with others”. This flexibility requires letting go of the past and accepting fragmentation in favor of spontaneity and being at the disposal of demands, making the craft unreadable.

The author describes the work of Greek immigrants in a Boston bakery in the 1970s: “very noisy, the smell of yeast mixed with that of human sweat in the hot rooms; the bakers had their hands constantly dipped in flour and water; the men used both their noses and their eyes to judge when the bread was ready” (Sennett, 2000, p. 77). Twenty-five years later, when he returned to the

same bakery, he found sophisticated, reconfigurable machines and, as a consequence, “the bakers no longer really know how to make the bread... it has become a representation on a screen... the work is no longer legible to them, in the sense of understanding what they are doing” (Sennett, 2020, p. 80). Most of these workers feel that they do not make bread, but just press buttons. They are teachers who apply a method, who speak the language of their students (Unina, 2020), who are “up-to-date” (Unina, 2020), who “please”, who eventually reach their targets (Ball, 2012; Biesta, 2012), but who have difficulties when it comes to thinking about the meanings of what they are doing.

In the imposition of neoliberal Truth, in the unquestionability of bowing to the designs of the market god, flexibility reveals itself to be the rigidity of a machine. It is inflexible about the possibilities of creating another world through human action. It is not capitalism that is flexible, as Sennett (2000) points out, but everything else that is affected by the inflexibility of the market. In this rigid flexibility, teachers — entrepreneurial and competent — do not need to know many things, they need to have a good disposition to adapt to demands and thus be “psycho-affective resilient, trained for change and novelty, imaginative, cheerful, active, participative... adaptable, with a will to succeed, decision-making ability, a spirit of leadership and, at the same time, cooperation” (Fernández Liria, García Fernández and Galindo Ferrández, 2017, p. 17). Based on this internalized Truth (through their colonized imaginary), they understand their activity as providing a service that needs to satisfy their clients’ desires, without asking questions about the desirability of what is desired, without asking “whether what is desired — not only in terms of what one wants to have, but also in terms of what one wants to be — is really desirable for one’s own life and for life with others on this earth” (Biesta, 2018, p. 27). From the dogma of flexibility, they assume that change is pervasive and that adapting to it is an imperative, disregarding “that life provokes to explore whether it is worth adapting to the circumstances that present themselves, or whether the first task [of education] is actually to try to create better circumstances” (Biesta, 2018, p. 26).

This desubjectivization (Gur-Ze’ev, 2005b) occurs and takes shape in the naturalization of intersubjective relationships that take place under the designs of the market god (Dufour, 2008; Crary, 2016; Benjamin, 2019). And they are reinforced by training — coaching style — by a “solitary ‘protagonist’ of their own learning who has nothing to claim: if they do not fit into the job market, it is because they did not know how to make proper use of their vital and academic protagonism” (Fernández Liria, García Fernández and Galindo Ferrández, 2017, p. 89). This establishes the idea of “lifelong learning” (Biesta, 2017) as a necessity in the face of the obsessive production rhythms that precariously degrade the teaching profession to that of an “educational technician” (Ball, 2012) determined by innovation and novelty, in other words, externally. And “motivation”, which tries to convince teachers that they must change their perceptions before they become hopelessly outdated, plays the role of deactivating “any initiative that has a political or vindicatory character, promoting a particular type of functional idiocy for consumer societies” (Fernández Liria, García Fernández and Galindo Ferrández, 2017, p. 218), in a process of teacher dehumanization, or (de)formation, in which (at least) three radically interconnected characteristics stand out.

The first is an “infantile plasticity” (Fernández Liria, García Fernández and Galindo Ferrández, 2017, p. 157) that seeks perpetual control through a business-like indoctrination: without references, completely flexible. To do this, it is necessary to destroy the ineffective, outdated figure of the teacher and make him constantly bureaucratically supervised in his behavior, making his own work unreadable. Schools — seen as businesses — do not need teachers to be trained, but rather to adapt and be willing “to do whatever, however, wherever and for whatever salary” (Fernández Liria, García Fernández and Galindo Ferrández, 2017, p. 225). Teachers (their bodies and their time) are required

to be available at all times. Replacing the idea of excellence with the idea of quality determined by adapting to society's (the market's) demands, as indicated by "experts" specializing in the quality of cucumbers, hotels and — also — education, does not matter, because the "fundamental parameters for measuring quality are the so-called 'impact indices', carefully measured by private companies" (Fernández Liria, García Fernández and Galindo Ferrández, 2017, p. 258) or by governments who, according to neoliberal logic, are mere servants of the market, which eliminates difficulties in order to increase profits. If the indices improve, then everything is working well. However, the indicators only measure what is measurable and the emphasis on metrics hides aspects of the teaching profession that cannot be measured and tabulated, such as ethics, listening, care and the invitation to an alteritarian encounter. The danger of this is that the non-measurable dimensions of the profession can escape attention (Biesta, 2017).

Secondly, it eliminates and considers ridiculous the idea of fidelity, replaced by the idea of engagement, which is a "fidelity without love" (Flusser, 2019, p. 168) in relation to "objects" as a player's gesture, as a survival strategy. This commitment carries with it the meritocratic belief and complements itself very well with the flexibility that appears to us as supposed freedom: "we are free to tie and untie countless relationships, and these relationships become progressively looser... accompanied by the feeling of growing loneliness" (Flusser, 2019, p. 166). In the case of teachers, there is a possibility that they do not consider it important to talk seriously (i.e. beyond mere concepts) about solidarity, about alternatives for existence, about other possible worlds:

24/7 is structured around individual goals of competitiveness, promotion, acquisition, personal security and comfort at the expense of others. The future is so close at hand that it can only be imagined as identical to the struggle for individual gain or survival in the most superficial of presents. (Crary, 2016, p. 50)

As a corollary of this "engagement" with one's own success, this concern with one's own survival in a society that changes all the time and for which one must always be available, always adapted, produces a responsibility without accountability. In other words, everyone is responsible for themselves, they are concerned about themselves and their employability, about "pleasing" and "being in the know" (Unina, 2020). And in this sense, no one is responsible for the other and for the world. Teachers understand their work as that of a technician (Ball, 2012), like Sennett's new bakers (2000). They do not understand their craft as taking place in a unique environment that involves intergenerational coexistence — conversation — as a social and cultural bond that ensures the transmission of memory, culture and the world (Larrosa, 2007, p. 5). He does not recognize any authority in his job, which is manifested in the responsibility to take care of children and young people and the world at the same time: to make sure that the world is still a habitable place for them and, above all, to make sure that they can insert themselves into the world and renew it by creating new ways of living with each other, with others and with nature (Arendt, 2016; Biesta, 2018; Larrosa, 2021). This (de)formation abandons the new generations to the storms of the market demands of the here and now, the worst can happen and no one is responsible for it (Arendt, 2016), "in these demarcations and in these ruptures that separate generations from each other, blocking the possibility of a dialog and, therefore, of an exchange that can be based on what comes from afar and on what else the newcomers contribute" (Forster, 2007, p. 35). The other is only a competitor; rarely, if ever, a companion.

Finally, the pervasive demand for results, for performance, for self-control and self-responsibility, in a 24/7 regime, in which work is ubiquitous, in which any fragment of time is capitalized and cannot be "wasted" under penalty of becoming (even more) outdated, makes it difficult to stop.

Such a regime deeply educates us not to think. To think is to “stop to think” (Arendt, 2004, p. 243), to interrupt activities (Biesta, 2017), to look carefully, to linger. Taking time is difficult since “we live in a time when there is no longer any place or time for nostalgia”, in which “speed has taken over the world”, “since, at any time and in any place, since the advent of mobile devices, our bodies and minds are plugged into databases, information and personal networks” (Santaella, 2013, p. 125-126). According to Crary (2016, p. 43),

The most important recent changes concern less mechanized forms of visualization than the disintegration of the human ability to see, especially the ability to associate visual identification with ethical and social evaluations. With an infinite and perpetually available supply of requests and attractions, 24/7 incapacitates vision through processes and homogenization, redundancy and acceleration. Despite claims to the contrary, we are witnessing the diminution of mental and perceptual capacities rather than their expansion and modulation. The situation today is comparable to the glare of high-intensity lighting or thick fog, in which the absence of tonal variations does not allow us to make perceptual distinctions and orient ourselves according to shared temporalities. The glare, in this case, is not the literal brightness, but the uninterrupted stridency of the monotonous stimulus, in which an extensive range of reactive capacities is frozen.

Not stopping to think, not slowing down and then not questioning what is offered as irrepressible is renouncing human capacities to think and act, clinging to formulas prescribed (by the market, by “experts”, etc.) as norms to be followed because they are naturalized, because they are imposed as Truth (Arendt, 2004). This renunciation also implies renouncing another world, and thus reinforces the hegemony of the neoliberal discourse.

CONCLUSION

The statement that teachers always need to be in training, that they need constant updating, is commonplace in speeches by politicians, education reformers, teacher trainers, degree students, researchers and institutions in the education sector. We argue that this statement has reached the status of a hegemonic, consensual, discourse. Through the political analysis of educational discourse (Laclau and Mouffe, 2015a; Plá, 2022) we seek to stress the extent to which this discourse is aligned with the expansion of neoliberalism in the educational sector, especially with regard to the relationship with time within the framework of neoliberalism, taken here as an educational phenomenon.

Based on the examples cited and the authors used, we can affirm that the discourse of permanent updating understands education based on market assumptions and teachers as outdated professionals whose debt (to their “clients” and to the market) is never repaid. In this situation, teachers are exposed to evaluation criteria focused on results and pressured to give up their “free” time, voluntarily subverting it into time for work: self-responsibility, motivation and employability. All time is then transformed into working time, including the periods dedicated to rest and sleep (the last frontier of capitalism’s advance), the targets of the argument that teachers can update themselves at any time, given the ubiquity of the “training opportunities” available and accessible at the click of a button.

To avoid misunderstandings: this is not to say that after completing an initial training course, such as a degree, a teacher is ready and trained. What we mean to say is that the discourse that teachers need to be always in training, always up-to-date, that they should find time in their

schedules to qualify and improve their professionalism has been captured and serves the interests of neoliberalism and private or public agents (who operate from the paradigm of private enterprise — value for money). It has been relegated to the status of a cliché and, ultimately, this discourse colonizes the imaginary, oppresses and dehumanizes teachers and is detrimental to tackling the inequalities produced and reinforced by the neoliberal governance model. This model results in “absolute incompatibility with life” (Crary, 2016, p. 41).

In this process, although the desired results (development goals) are eventually achieved satisfactorily, the true teaching dimension of the teaching activity is lost: the ability to look, to care, to put things into perspective, to invite people to imagine other ways of experiencing the world, to foster a tense, uncertain and uncontrollable encounter with the otherness of the other, to think. All of this requires time; not time as a commodity, as something that can be managed, but rather as a condition for human life. Time to make mistakes, to reflect on mistakes, to experiment, to listen. This is also “training”, but of a different kind, freed from the pressure for results. This type of training requires an openness to the hospitable (and counterproductive, from the market’s perspective) dialectic through which

there is no possibility of avoiding disagreement, of escaping the error that underlies any of those who take part in an exchange in which complex worlds come into play, universes of ideas, past experiences, dreams realized or postponed, disconnected and wandering criticisms, glances that do not correspond to each other, diverse flaws intertwined with the enigma of language, of what fails in it and continually moves into unexpected dimensions. (Forster, 2007, p. 48)

It is precisely in these failures, in these fraternal encounters and mismatches, that the bureaucratism and technicality that promise a world of pain-free management that annuls the other and the self disappears. This means that, more than constantly training, we need good training that recognizes our limitations, our tiredness and the need to build other worlds. An education that does not naturalize the theft of time promoted by neoliberal capitalism, but one that understands time as a precious part of existence, as non-negotiable, even if used for doing nothing, as something that reminds us that we are human and not machines. Time is all we have; it is not money, it is not merchandise. It is the condition for us to still be able to experience a human life.

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